

# COAL FATAL

PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF MINES  
BY J. J. MCDONALD

SUBJECT: Explosion, Sewickley Township, Westmoreland County,  
April 26, 1925.

An explosion occurred on April 26, 1925, at 9:50 p.m., at a new slope being opened by a Contractor in Sewickley Township, Westmoreland County, resulting in the death of five people.

As the locality from newspaper reports indicated that the explosion occurred at or near where the 11th., 19th and 22nd districts join, Inspector Bell called Inspector McDonald on the phone and suggested that he ~~Communicate~~ with Inspector Stoker and that we meet at the scene of the explosion to determine in whose district said slope is located, as no inspector had been notified that work had commenced on a new opening.

On April the 29th., 1925, we met on the scene and found that the Westmoreland Coal Company is making a new opening into the Pittsburgh seam, located on the Yuckon Branch, P. R. R. and on the northeast bank of the Big Sewickley creek.

The chief engineer of the Westmoreland Coal Company happened to be on the premises and assisted in locating the new opening on our district map; if this map is correct, the opening is within the boundary of the 22nd district.

A shaft has been sunk to the coal, 258 feet in depth. The slope is down to the coal and 863 feet long, on a pitch of 17 and a half degrees. 16 feet high and 12 feet wide. When finished the slope will have two compartments, one above the other, the lower compartment will be used entirely as a traveling way. Two entries extend about 80 to 90 feet into the coal. This coal was taken out by the contractor for use in his operation. The contractor is in charge of the slope and will be until he completes the work contracted for.

The only means of ventilation in the slope is by compressed air conducted thru a two inch pipe which was also used to run a pump at the bottom of the slope; we found hose connected to the lower end of the pipe to a point where the entries separated.

No work had been done in the slope since the explosion. We found explosive gas generating in the entries and diffusing. The sides and roof in the entries are wet, and water had accumulated at the foot of the slope and entries to a depth of 1 and a half to 2 feet.

Incandescent electric lights were used for illumination. We

were informed that the workmen carried Wolf safety lamps.

The Superintendent stated that he went in with the workmen at the beginning of shifts and made tests for gas before they commenced work; he also stated that the night foreman did likewise on his shift.

A night shift of four people were at work in stope about 500 feet from the entrance, taking down loose material from roof and sides with bars, the men doing this work from a box-plat-form placed in a mine car, which could be moved up or down the slope as required. One of the men was up the slope some distance from the others to signal to the fifth man at the entrance, who in turn signaled to the engineer when the car was to be moved.

The Superintendent stated that no drilling or blasting was being done on this shift and that no explosives were in the slope at the time of an explosion.

The bodies of three men were found near the car which had been moved up the slope and was off the track, the box-platform was demolished, the fourth man was found some distance up the slope from the others; these bodies were badly mangled. The fifth man at the entrance was blown to pieces.

The conditions in the slope indicated that the initial point of the explosion was at or near where the men were at work, as there was evidence of force in both directions from that point.

The wires used for electric lights were insulated and hung on the side of the slope on wooden pegs with nails, and about 2 and a half feet above the track. Bare spots were noticed on the wires, indicating that extension lights were used.

From the evidence as given above, we believe that a body of gas had accumulated, and was ignited by the lights used by the men on the platform.

JOSEPH J. WALSH  
SECRETARY OF MINES

FRANK HALL  
DEPUTY SECRETARY



PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF MINES  
HARRISBURG

1 ~~Mr. Harrington~~ *HH*  
2 ~~Mr. Rice~~ *GRK*  
3 ~~Mr. Adams~~

6/7/27

June 6, 1927.

Mr. W. W. Adams, Statistician,  
Bureau of Mines,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Adams:

We inclose herewith copies  
of the Inspectors' reports concerning the  
explosion at the slope of the Westmoreland  
Coal Company, May 15, 1925.

Very truly yours,

*Frank Hall*

Deputy Secretary of Mines.

FH/M

*J?*



6/1/27  
W.H.H.

Pittsburgh, Pa.,  
May 16, 1925

Mr. Joseph J. Walsh,  
Secretary of Mines,  
Harrisburg, Pa.

Dear Sir:

*Type this into also*

As per your request and supplementing our report to you and notice to the contractor, dated May 1, 1925 on the explosion at the new slope opening of the Westmoreland Coal Company in Sewickley Township, Westmoreland County, we made another inspection of the above slope on May 15, 1925, and found as follows:-

First:- That a small blower fan had been placed near the entrance to the slope connected to a conduit about one foot in diameter extending to the foot of slope for ventilation; but, this means as at present operated is not sufficient to supply ample ventilation to dilute, render harmless and carry off all noxious gases generated therein. We requested the contractor to increase the volume of air, then notify us and we will make another inspection. This he agreed to do.

Second:- That a certified official is on hand and making examinations as per our instructions.

Third:- That approved electric cap lamps in conjunction with approved safety lamps are being used exclusively.

Fourth- We were assured that all safety lamps are being examined by a competent person before being given to the workmen at the beginning of each shift.

We also found that all electric wires had been removed from the slope.

The following sections of the Bituminous Mining

Laws are involved in this case; and the questions arising, in



6/1/27  
MWR  
Pittsburgh, Pa.  
May 1, 1925

Mr. Joseph J. Walsh,  
Secretary of Mines,  
Harrisburg, Pa.

Dear Sir:

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As the locality from newspaper reports indicated that the explosion occurred at or near where the 11th., 19th and 22nd districts join, Inspector Bell called Inspector McDonald on the phone and suggested that he communicate with Inspector Stoker and that we meet at the scene of the explosion to determine in whose district said slope is located, as no inspector had been notified that work had commenced on a new opening.

On April the 29th., 1925, we met on the scene and found that the Westmoreland Coal Company is making a new opening into the Pittsburgh seam, located on the Yukon Branch, P. R. R. and on the northeast bank of the Big Sewickley creek.

The chief engineer of the Westmoreland Coal Company happened to be on the premises and assisted in locating the new opening on our district map; if this map is correct, the opening is within the boundary of the 22nd district.

A shaft has been sunk to the coal, 258 feet in depth. The slope is down to the coal and 863 feet long, on a pitch of  $17\frac{1}{2}$  degrees. 16 feet high and 12 feet wide. When finished the slope will have two compartments, one above the other, the lower compartment will be used for taking in supplies, the upper compartment will be used entirely as a traveling way. Two entries extend about 80 or 90 feet into the coal. This coal was taken out by the contractor for use in his operation. The contractor is in charge of the slope and will be until he completes the work contracted for.

The only means of ventilation in the slope is by compressed air conducted thru a two inch pipe which was also used to run a pump at the bottom of slope; we found hose connected to the lower end of the pipe to a point where the entries separated.

No work had been done in the slope since the explosion. We found explosive gas generating in the entries and diffusing. The sides and roof in the entries are wet, and water had accumulated at the foot of the slope and entries to a depth of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 feet.

Incandescent electric lights were used for illumination. We were informed that the workmen carried Wolf safety lamps.

The Superintendent stated that he went in with the workmen at the beginning of shifts and made tests for gas before they commenced work; he also stated that the night foremen did likewise on his shift.

A night shift of four persons were at work in the slope about 500 feet from the entrance, taking down loose material from roof and sides with bars, the men doing this work from a box-plat-form placed in a mine car, which could be moved up or down the slope as required. One of the men was up the slope some distance from the others to signal to the fifth man at the entrance, who in turn signaled to the engineer when car was to be moved.



6/1/27  
Walt

Pittsburgh, Pa.,  
May 16, 1925

Mr. Joseph J. Walsh,  
Secretary of Mines,  
Harrisburg, Pa.

*this info also*

Dear Sir:

As per your request and supplementing our report to you and notice to the contractor, dated May 1, 1925 on the explosion at the new slope opening of the Westmoreland Coal Company in Sewickley Township, Westmoreland County, we made another inspection of the above slope on May 15, 1925, and found as follows:-

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Second:- That a certified official is on hand and making examinations as per our instructions.

Third:- That approved electric cap lamps in conjunction with approved safety lamps are being used exclusively.

Fourth- We were assured that all safety lamps are being examined by a competent person before being given to the workmen at the beginning of each shift.

We also found that all electric wires had been removed from the slope.

The following sections of the Bituminous Mining

Laws are involved in this case; and the questions arising, in



order as quoted on which we are not clear and need advice.

1. ARTICLE 3, SECTION 8. "The operator or the superintendent of every mine shall within thirty days thereafter, send to the inspector notices of the following occurrences."

Second. "When any work has commenced for the purpose of opening a new mine."

ARTICLE 27, SECTION 1. "Whenever a fatal accident occurs in or about any mine, or whenever an explosion or other serious accident of an unusual nature occurs, whether fatal or not, it shall be the duty of the mine foreman or superintendent in charge of such mine to give notice thereof forthwith, by telephone or telegraph, to the inspector, and also to the coroner of the county, if any person is killed."

ARTICLE 1. DEFINITIONS. OPERATOR:- "The term "Operator" means any firm, corporation, or individual operating any coal mine, or any part thereof."

QUESTION:- Who shall send notice to the inspector in these cases? The coal operator or the contractor, or both.

2. ARTICLE 7, SECTION 4. IN PART:- "Where explosive gas is encountered, the person in charge shall see that the shaft is examined, before each shift, and before the men descend after each ~~xxx~~ blast, and see that the place is safe. In sinking shafts, blasts must be exploded by an electric battery. Provision must also be made for the proper ventilation of shafts while being sunk."

ARTICLE 1. DEFINITIONS. SLOPE:- "The term "slope" means an incline or opening for the same purpose as a shaft."

QUESTION: Do the legal requirements applying to a shaft also apply to a slope?

3. ARTICLE 28, SECTION 2:- "The provisions of this act as to mines, or portions of a mine, generating explosive gas in quantities sufficient to be detected by an approved safety lamp, shall not apply to any mine wherein explosive gas is being generated only in live entries."

QUESTION:- Is the slope in this case a live entry?

A legal opinion from the Attorney General on the above questions will now be necessary, to determine what further action the case requires.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) J. J. McDonald, Inspector,  
11th Bituminous District

James J. Stoker, Inspector,  
19th Bituminous District

John F. Bell, Inspector,  
22nd Bituminous District.



6/1/25  
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Respectfully submitted;

(Signed) J. J. McDonald,  
11th Bituminous District

James J. Stoker,  
19th Bituminous District

John F. Bell,  
22nd Bituminous District.

P. S. We enclose herewith a copy of our notice to the contractor and his superintendent.



# COAL FATAL

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF MINES  
BY J. J. MCDONALD

SUBJECT: Explosion, Westmoreland Coal Company, Sewickley Township, Westmoreland County, PA., May 1, 1925.

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